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OAK PARK AND RIVER FOREST TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL
Oak Park, Illinois

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September 12, 1944

To: The Members Of The Board Of Education
From: Mr. Youngert
Subject: Informal Report To The Board Of Education, 1943-44

I. Our Students Face War Service

During the year we made it a matter of major concern to serve our students in relationships connected with the war. We believed that a principal cause of unrest in young people was the uncertainty that they faced, and that if we could constantly keep them accurately informed they would respond favorably to school opportunities. The faculty as a whole was generous with its help, and Mr. Bobbitt and Mr. Metcalf as deans of boys were towers of strength. That our efforts were fruitful is indicated by two facts: 1, teachers told me often that although they were working harder, classroom work was holding up and general student behavior was not deteriorating; 2, the median grade earned by the senior class has been exceeded only once in records that I have examined as far back as to 1922.

We started the year by securing for our boys directly from the offices of Secretaries Knox and Stimson exact information about military situations open to them through ordinary procedures and through special examinations. We then made it a point to become acquainted with military officers responsible for making contact with high school youth and invited them to use our facilities for addressing and examining interested students. Their cooperation was without exception splendid. We made many personal representations in behalf of particular young people, a large number of which won positive results. Our library bought quite a stock of books and pamphlets officially presenting facts about preparing for and entering military service, made them easily accessible, and relaxed in their instance its usual concern about lost material. Its major interest was enlightenment of eager students rather than careful husbanding of stuff much of which would be obsolete after the close of the war. It seemed to us that we were constantly presenting authoritative assemblies for students who had expressed interest in specialized phases of war activity, and that the gratitude of boys and girls (for through Miss Bennett's leadership we did much for girls) was payment in full for the labors that we laid down for them. We continued the specific war-preparation courses to which I referred in last year's report, although we agreed with the statement expressed over and over again by high government officers that our best training of all youth was that contained in our school's regular offerings. Our efforts in behalf of our students militarily, additional as they were to our regular work, made the year strenuous, but at the same time grateful. Had we done less than we did, we could never look back upon this awful time in the lives of boys and girls with professional satisfaction.

Our Military Affairs Committee has been zealously gathering the names of graduates and former students of our school who have served in the armed forces of our country. It now has a list of some 3500 names that it has published in Oak Leaves for verification, and is regularly adding to them.

The results of its work are somehow to be included in the Memorial Hall into which we plan to convert the principal entrance hall of our building.

A matter of personal gratification to me was my part as a committee member in getting Illinois Selective Service to improve its method of gathering information for use by psychiatrists in the medical examinations of draftees. The original method involved collection by secret reports from many teachers of opinions teachers are not professionally trained to make, opinions about behavior traits of boys that might indicate potential instability under the conditions of military service. In a meeting with a ranking medical officer of Selective Service in Cook County we secured a new order to the effect that in schools possessing well-organized personnel staffs the reports should be composite reports by the members of those staffs in consultation with each other. This procedure is in line with good guidance theory, and proved to be one that Selective Service was glad to accept. I am certain that in this effort we served our boys well.

II. Youth Works For Wages

Together with the War Manpower Commission we made an interesting study of the out-of-school employment of our students. The commission was eager to secure the work-cooperation of young people, but it was concerned, as we were, lest the availability of positions cause large numbers of boys and girls to leave school permanently or to work too long hours while attempting also to remain in school. Our study was part of a joint undertaking to formulate a reasonable policy of employment of school youth in the war effort. The policy that was generally adopted was that if students were employed not over four hours per school day they should be permitted to carry a full school load so long as they kept their classwork up; that if they were employed up to six hours, they might carry a three-fourths school load; and that if they were employed more than six hours they should be limited to a one-half school load. It was our experience that most employers were willing to help us execute this policy. Our total number of students reporting themselves working for wages was 1045; 642 boys, 403 girls. Of this total, only 81 worked regularly more than twenty-eight hours per week, according to our study. A factor operating to keep down the hours employed per day per student in industry was the help that Mr. Fritzemeier gave employers in organizing three hour shifts for high school boys and girls and in giving suggestions for the supervision of high school youth on the job. One employer stated that in the three hour (four to seven p.m.) shift set up by him with Mr. Fritzemeier's assistance he got better results than he had formerly obtained in a four-hour shift under conventional supervision. We believe that in cooperation with the War Manpower Commission and with industry we have helped prevent serious over-work of high school students in a time of labor shortage and at the same time have helped make it possible for boys and girls of high school age to contribute their services to the war effort in a manner satisfactory both to themselves and to their employers.

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III. Four Deans Retire

From the point of view of general organization the most critical and significant collective event of the year was the retirement of four deans, all for reasons of health. Two of the resignations I had anticipated, for a year ago Miss Bennett and Mr. Bobbitt had spoken so directly of their impending retirements that I had taken steps to propose their successors. The other two I was reasonably certain would not come in until next year at the earliest, although I knew that Miss Weckel was husbanding her strength and that Miss Blackburn had been none too well during part of the year. Fortunately, I had been searching for women to gain experience as teachers in our school prior to later appointment as deans, and had decided upon two to be recommended for election to our faculty. Therefore, when first Miss Weckel and then Miss Blackburn reported that because of physical condition they would retire at the end of the 1943-44 school year, I was able to recommend Miss Eva L. Pring and Miss Anna Kurko as their successors, although I would have preferred to afford Miss Pring and Miss Kurko the benefit of a year's experience in our classrooms before assumption of the duties of dean. Our deans staff now will consist of the following persons: freshman, Miss Pring and Mr. Ketcham; sophomore, Miss Kurko and Mr. O'Brien; junior, Miss Hartmann and Mr. Metcalf; senior, Miss Horner and Mr. Fritzemeier.

As I analyze the principal functions of a deans staff, I see them as these: 1, assimilation; 2, fundamental development; 3, distribution. In our organization, the function of assimilation is performed primarily under the leadership of the deans of freshmen, who cooperate with the elementary schools to help bring eighth grade graduates intelligently into the ninth grade and who conduct a program designed to assist new boys and girls to become happy, successful citizens of our school. The function of fundamental development is carried forward primarily under the leadership of the deans who serve sophomores and juniors, for it is in the second and third years that major direction really is given to the school purposes of high school youth. The function of distribution is performed primarily under the leadership of the deans of seniors. When students reach the senior class their senior programs have been arranged by their previous deans. It is the business of the senior deans to get seniors graduated and to distribute them to their next vocations, be those further study in other institutions of learning, gainful employment, or other service to themselves and to society. For that reason, I have recommended that the position of placement director be incorporated into the work of the senior deans, and that the senior deans function as both placement and college advisers. The functions that I have discussed are not exclusively the responsibility of the deans to whom I have herein allocated them, for at times all deans must perform all of them for some students. But I believe that to an extent so great as to be rule these functions distribute themselves as presented in this paragraph, and we are effecting an organization in accordance with that belief.

More and more we shall bring <u>all</u> faculty members into the guidance program in their capacities as classroom and home room teachers. We shall operate as though each pair of deans were co-department heads, their departments made up of home room teachers serving under their leadership; and we shall ask the deans in actual courses and incidentally to instruct their

teachers in the art of guidance, with special emphasis directed to the needs of the boys and girls under their immediate care. We shall plan it as though horizontally we were organized into such instructional departments as Science, Social Studies, Industrial Arts, etc., under the leadership of department heads, and vertically into guidance departments cross-cutting all aspects of the school, under the leadership of deans. Of course, there will be no clear-cut division horizontally and vertically, for the purpose of this organization will be to give guidance direction to all that we do. However, the figure illustrates fairly well the objectives we seek.

IV. Resignations - Signs Of The Times

The number of teachers who left our school at the end of the 1943-44 school year and during the summer was much larger than is usually the case. Nine persons retired under the Illinois plan for pensioning teachers - four deans and five classroom teachers. Two women were granted leaves of absence to serve in our country's armed forces, and one resigned to enter the recreation force of the American Red Cross. The two women in our Music department resigned to be married, one to live in Missouri and one in New York. A teacher of Art resigned to become director of the reorganization of an Art department in a college. Another Art teacher left to go with an industrial concern at a beginning salary approximately eleven per cent higher than our present maximum salary, which she would have reached with us in eight years. One of our able young women resigned in order to be at home with her father who is victim of an illness that according to his physician probably will be final and of rather long duration. Toward the end of the school year we lost two teachers through death. Thus, in a school in which an annual turnover of six or seven faculty members has been normal, we lost in one year nineteen, two of whom may return upon the expiration of their leaves of absence.

For several reasons, the replacement of teachers was not easy this year. Teachers of science and mathematics have been in heavy demand by the armed forces and by industry. When I wondered why teachers of Romance languages were scarce. I was told that Government agencies had recently sent out calls for fifteen hundred competent teachers of French and Spanish. Many teachers on the low salary schedules of most school systems had left public school work and had entered the employ of private business and of the Federal Government, both of which, free of the restrictive tax rates under which schooldistricts operate, could offer temptingly high wages. Many school systems, temporarily or otherwise, have increased their salary offerings sufficiently to hold teachers who ordinarily would have been seeking positions in suburban schools in our vicinity. And teacher training institutions because of their sharply curtailed enrollments were not graduating their usual number of new teachers into the teaching profession. Despite these conditions, I report gratefully that our policy of being constantly on the alert for prospective teachers for our school paid handsome dividends this year, and that in my opinion we are adding able persons to our staff.

In this connection, an observation is in order relative to the Illinois Teacher Tenure Act. Tenure laws have been placed upon the books largely because of the arbitrary manner in which school systems frequently have dismissed teachers. They are a natural reaction to intolerable treatment of professional employees. However, if tenure laws are to operate fairly, we who teach must recognize certain obligations that they impose upon us. The Illinois law requires boards of education by resolution to notify teachers at least sixty days before the end of the school year that they will not be re-employed; but it permits teachers with impunity to leave their positions as late as thirty days before the beginning of the new school year. Further, it gives the County Superintendent power to suspend the teaching certificate of a teacher who without a release from his board of education leaves his position later than thirty days before the beginning of the new school year. From these facts it will be clear that if teachers leave after or shortly before the above mentioned deadline, it will be difficult to replace them because of the reluctance of boards to release those who might be approached as replacement teachers. If we who teach want the benefits of tenure acts, we must not leave positions so late in the season as to make it difficult for schools to find new teachers. This obligation is not a new one, but it is placed in strong light as an unwritten concomitant of the protection afforded us by the tenure law against capricious dismissal after we have served our probationary years.Four of our teachers sought releases so late as to make impossible our approach to other teachers before the deadline referred to earlier in this paragraph. The fact that we shall have our positions well filled does not lessen the importance of the point that I am making, for most schools, less favorably situated geographically than are we, would under like circumstances very likely have been unable to secure competent replacements.

The turnover in our clerical staff during these war years is not yet 100%, and I hope that it will not soon become that. However, of fourteen women employed now in clerical positions, two were here when our country entered the war. The business of finding new persons has been difficult in times in which salaries in local public institutions simply could not keep pace with salaries affected by the impact of the "cost plus" system, but I am happy to be able to report to you that I believe that we now have a satisfactory and a potentially highly competent clerical staff.

V. Curriculum Development

1. High Schools long have talked about the desirability of presenting in the place of standard courses in Botany and Zoology a unified study of functions common to living organisms, with emphasis upon healthful living. But, in my opinion, the talk has eventuated usually not in a new type of course, but in a telescoped study of Botany and Zoology which has stressed knowledge of scientific facts rather than ability to generalize from significant related facts. I had hoped that Miss Weckel would be able to stay with us and lead us in the development of our new course in Biology, for she is deeply interested in it. However, Dr. Grant, our new Biology head, believes in the kind of course we want and has done pioneer work toward its realization. Our teachers of biological science are competent to turn out a superior new course, and I am certain that they will do so. Later I shall

want them to go to work on the freshman health science project that I proposed last year, and upon advanced courses for students who in general Biology have acquired interests urging them to further study in specific areas in biological science.

2. Our experiments in teaching Chemistry on three levels of presentation advanced satisfactorily last year. In 1942-43, the long illness of the teacher who was directing the development of the non-mathematical, practical Chemistry course militated against the success of the venture, but last year the course made splendid progress. Whether our hope will be realized to evolve out of this course one in general physical science I do not know, but that hope continues to be our ambition. Our upper level course for students of rather high ability has become a regular part of the department. The third level is comparable to usual teaching of high school Chemistry.

3. Our Industrial Arts teachers have wanted to make a thorough investigation of their offerings in the light of the general and vocational contributions that they should make to high school education, but during the early part of the year the almost excessive demands upon the time of Industrial Arts teachers by the war adult training program made such a study impossible. However, late in the winter the study was begun, but it was halted by the death of the department's head, Mr. Taylor. Toward the close of the year, Mr. Brinkman, the new head, revived it, and I am hopeful that in the coming year it will make appreciable progress. When the time comes to replace the combustible north portion of our plant, it will be important that our building be adapted to our program of instruction and not the program to the building.

4. In both Music and Art we made substantial progress, but during the summer we lost two of the three instructors in each department. For Music we have employed new teachers promising enough to let us believe that what we have gained will not all be lost, but in Art we may have to mark time for a semester under local substitutes who generously have offered us their help. But there is a chance that fortune may smile upon us. When our two Art resignations came in, I had the temerity to ask the Army whether it would not release Mr. Pelz (Art department head on military leave) back to us because of our emergency situation, and I have had word that my request has been acted upon favorably by Mr. Pelz' post. After the Army's approval has been formally given, Illinois Selective Service and the local draft board will make the final decision in the matter.

5. There was high interest in foreign languages last year. Many opportunities were grasped to dramatize our language study in the light of current history. Fine Assemblies were held in which addresses were given in the foreign languages and in which music and entertainment reflected the countries whose languages we study. Several parties were held portraying foreign customs, and language clubs had a flourishing year.

6. Our new English course of study is well on the way to general acceptance except in the portions designed for second semester freshmen and juniors. However, the department's curriculum committee is at work on the disputed portions and can be expected to lead in the development of a wholly acceptable course of study.

7. The Mathematics department's new course in Shop Mathematics received a considerable amount of study last year and will be offered to our students in 1944-45. The department was not satisfied with its results in General Mathematics and will continue its committee in that course next year. It is not unlikely that eventually we shall have to write a great deal of our own material for General Mathematics. Thus far, the department has found no textbook satisfactory to it.

8. Our Physical Education department received commendations from several sources during the year. The Gym Exhibit was attended by many directors and teachers of Physical Education and was praised by them as a fine demonstration of excellent teaching.

9. There was a sharp drop in enrollment in the Commercial department last year which, fortunately, we had anticipated. Students gave two reasons for the drop: 1, emphasis by the armed forces on the academic studies; 2, their ability to secure jobs without specialized training.

10. Enrollment in Home Economics continued to decline. I have asked the department to make this situation its major present study. It is my opinion that in a school as large as ours the Home Economics department should be twice as large as it is. We shall make an effort to learn from students why they avoid Home Economics and what kinds of courses and procedures they would like us to have. One of our teachers who attended Home Economics classes last summer in one of our universities will direct this study. We know, of course, that there is nothing inviting in the equipment in our cooking laboratory.

11. We have insisted in all departments that courses of study must never be considered perfect and permanent, but that at all times continuing curriculum studies should be the rule. I believe that we have made progress toward that goal.

VI. Some Faculty Committees

A new committee on clubs was established last year whose scope was soon expanded to include the whole area of extra-curricular activities. The work of the committee to date has been largely exploratory, although several of its recommendations have resulted in action. There had been a committee on clubs which had served without a single replacement for over twenty years. At their own suggestion, all of the members of that committee resigned last fall, and the new committee was set up with two members of the old committee on its roll. One of those was Mr. Bobbitt, who now has retired. Sometime during the 1944-45 school year the Student Council will be invited to suggest several students for appointment to the new committee.

The Evaluation Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Seymour, has done a really tremendous amount of work. It deals with fundamentals of our whole teaching program and frequently stirs up highly controversial issues. On the basis of its studies it will in 1944-45 present recommendations to the faculty that will touch the purposes, procedures, and evaluation of teaching, which recommendations will be the basis for several faculty meetings.

The Faculty Council continued to be a valuable organization as a forum for the discussion of matters presented by teachers. I do not regularly attend meetings of the Council, but do attend when I am invited to be present. In my judgment, the Council's study of the question of medical examinations of our staff was an excellent piece of work. Mr. Metcalf was the very able president of the Council last year.

VII. Adult Education

The war-training evening school that we have conducted for two years in cooperation with the University of Illinois had a smaller enrollment last year than in 1942-43, and a probably more able faculty. We are offering the school again for 1944-45, and are anticipating a further decline in enrollment as a reflection of a general belief that the war is so nearly over that it is futile to seek additional training for war industry positions. During the year we closed out our program of training in machine operation because the enrollment dropped to so low a figure as to make it unprofitable for the Government for us to continue the classes. Our experience with evening schools makes us certain that when the war closes and we can devote ourselves to our own program we should give serious thought to the proposition that we establish an evening school for adults in our school district. Perhaps we can begin such a school in 1945-46.

VIII. Improvement Of Plant

Because of its practicability in times of shortage of materials, our proposal to re-wire and re-light our buildings made more progress last year than did the plan to reconstruct the combustible north section of the main building. Of course, the total wiring and lighting job cannot be done immediately, but experimental lighting in line with the survey made in 1943-44 will be installed early in the 1944-45 school year in two classrooms, a study hall, and the choral room. However, the matter of building did not lie dormant. The Board of Education, the Superintendent, and the Business Supervisor visited three high schools that have modern facilities of the type that we need, and steps preliminary to selection of an architect were made. It should be emphasized that those steps were preliminary only, for final action will await determination by the citizens of our school district.

IX. The Parent-Teacher Association

I hesitate to close this report without a special word of appreciation to our Parent-Teacher Association, Mr. O. B. Higgins, President, for its support of our activities last year. In addition to its regular programs, the Association presented two meetings of general and community-wide interest. One was an evening program for junior and senior girls and their parents, addressed by Dean Ruth McCarn, Northwestern University, and the other was a Sunday afternoon meeting for junior and senior boys and their parents, addressed by President Edward C. Elliott, Purdue University. Members of both audiences were profuse in thanks for insight that they had gained into the problems of youth of high school age in time of war. Our Parent-Teacher Association has been and is a constructive force in the work of our school.

X. To The Board Of Education, Thanks

I would be less than grateful if for myself and my colleagues I did not tender our thanks to the members of the Board of Education for strong and understanding support in what for us as well as for most persons engaged in the professions and in business has been because of its hosts of new problems probably the most difficult year of our careers. You of the Board of Education and we of the staff have been engaged in a common venture in the interest of high school boys and girls who have been affected closely by war -- too closely. I doubt that young people ever have faced more trying times. I know that they have faced them courageously. I believe that we shall always be glad that we stood in a position to help them.

Respectfully submitted,

Eugene Youngert

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